

Breaking Free

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Gamagoori's strict self-restraint backfired. What was originally a matter of keeping himself under control somehow spiraled into cold sweats and panic at the slightest sexual urge. Out of denial and embarrassment he's kept his issue secret for years. But now that Mako was his ever enthusiastic girlfriend, Gamagoori was having a harder and harder time of keeping things under wraps.

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The Day It Begins, Entwined

A kink meme fill for Gamagoori/Mako Erotophobia. I had to rewrite it three times and try out different ideas to come to this result and I plan at least one or two more chapters because the creative juices be flowing!

Hope you enjoy!

He could not be in any worse situation.

Be calm, Gamagoori, be calm. Breathe in, breathe out. Control, conceal, contain. It will not be revealed now nor ever. You can do this Gamagoori, you have done this for years. You will not have a panic attack here and now, in front of your girlfriend, control it! Breathe in, breathe out, focus on other things. Keep your eyes straight ahead, control your facial expressions, stop the involuntary shaking. Do not expose this situation to anyone. Keep away the thoughts, keep back the fear. Control your body as you have done for so long.

The fear passed. He relaxed for a moment before he realized that for a full two minutes and twenty-four seconds he had panicked about the girl sleeping peacefully on his lap as they lay watching a movie they had lost interest in. Her head laid precariously near his crotch and he was not enjoying the way her breath tickled the area with a bitter-sweet shiver. He wiped the cold sweat off his forehead, keeping his chest from heaving heavily from the aftershock of the panic attack. He looked down at her again and prayed that she would wake up and move so he could actually relax and make sure that he did not suffer once again from the embarrassing attacks.

He had not expected for them to increase or even happen as frequently with this change in relationship with her. He needed to switch up his thoughts, to distract his body and mind from... from the

urges. He started to pet her hair, hoping that the repetition would help and it did enough for a distraction.

Mako Mankanshoku continued to sleep away their date, her mouth hung open against his leg. She had no clue what she was doing to him right then, and even though she was awake and aware of his actions she faked her sleep and continued to snoop on him silently.

Gamagoori broke into another cold sweat, an urge rising up in his abdomen. He fought to keep his breath under control, fighting through the cold sweats as he soaked through the top of his shirt. She needed to get out of his lap now or something worse was to happen...

He felt her shift in his lap and then he heard the yawn, letting a breath of relief leave him as Mako sat up, rubbing her eyes as she came out of her nap.

"Did I fall asleep?" Mako asked look up at him with a soft smile. Gamagoori nodded quickly and helped her off his lap, setting her beside him. She leaned on his arm and sighed sleepily, cuddling up beside him.

With her arm draped into his lap, fingers all but resting on his crotch.

Keep calm, Gamagoori, she'll move her hand when she realizes where it is. She'll move it and he'll avoid another panic attack which was starting to bubble up in his gut. Control, conceal, contain. Control, conceal, contain. Do not show her what was going on in your head. You have this under control, don't panic, don't panic-

Were Mako's fingers tapping against his crotch now? He looked down nervously at her hand and found her smiling coyly up at him. She had her other hand on his chin, turning his face to her as she kissed him deeply. His hands moved against his mind's orders, at least respecting the order to push Mako's offending hand on his lap away, pulling her close and kissing back. He was relaxing for a moment, glad to just be kissing her and not fighting about the hand

on his crotch. They had done this before, with no sexual connotation and so far he felt no sexual vibes through their kisses. Mako's hand moved from his face to his shoulder, his fingers trailing eerie lines down his neck. The kiss heated up, Mako's tongue slipping into his mouth.

Now he had to back away before he panicked. He pushed Mako away softly and wiped the spit falling from his lips away. His hands were shaking.

"Gamagoori? What's wrong?"

He couldn't look her in the eyes. He had to look anywhere but her face. Calm down! Do not show it, do not show her what was happening! The guilt hit him just in time and the panic faded into the background. He let out a shaky breath, now dealing with the aftershock. Mako still watched him with concern, her hands hovering out in the gap between them. He felt even more guilt.

He was pushing away Mako in every attempt she had done to initiate anything sexual, which had started a week ago into their two-month long boyfriend-girlfriend relationship, and he honestly wished that he did not panic when any sort of sexual urge happened. For so long it was easy to control and hide because there was little to nothing to provoke such responses, and then he fell for Mako. The fearful urges from his lower regions and the images and dreams coming to him increased, all revolving around her. The guilt of feeling such things for the No-Star student who he knew he had no chance with helped him control them and his panic attacks. It changed once again when Mako stepped up to him and admitted having feelings for him, asking for a date.

Now two months later, here they stood. Fighting the secret he swore never to show and tell.

"Gamagoori?"

"I-I'm sorry Mako, I..." He couldn't, no, wouldn't tell her. He could never admit it. He couldn't even explain his actions to her, and that obviously did not sit well with her. A big pout came to her cute face, and she pointed an accusing finger at him

"Why do you keep on doing that? You keep on cowering away when I do things like that!"

"With good reason!" Gamagoori defended, not thinking beyond his statement. His figure was shaking from a bubbling panic with an urge swimming in his loins. Mako's hands rested on his chest, her fingers digging into his skin through his shirt.

"But couples do that! They kiss with tongue, they do little touches! I know that, I asked my mom! Couples that date for a long time get really close to their partners and start to do things with their bodies!" Mako argued. Gamagoori's face softened, his thoughts and fears taking a backseat for once. It dawned on him that he could at least try once.

"Alright. We... can try.."

Mako shook her head, and her hands ventured lower, her fingers this time playing with the elastic band of his pants. Gamagoori's heart roared up in his chest, his thoughts shrieking at the increasing urges and thoughts about going second base with Mako. He felt the need to say no but at the same time, the evil thought of 'keep going, keep going' entered his head and for the first time beat out his cry for stop. His body rebelled and he told her 'yes' to continue, his inner anxiety flaring up into infernos. He needed to get away, he needed to calm down and keep his urges chained down and dead. He could not go any further with this. He was going to snap, calm down dammit! His heart thudded painfully in his chest and he could feel burning tears start to prick at the corners of his eyes. It was going to break; the dam he had built around his fear was about to crack. He tried his best to hold it for her. Mako looked directly into his eyes, not seeing the fear trapped within his shields. She heard his yes and felt his body respond. She slipped two fingers under the band, her nails

tickling the bare skin before his pubic area. He sharply drew breath as she drew pointless circles around the same area, one daring to lower an inch closer to his privates.

The tears slipped down his face, and his shields broke into a thousand shards, releasing his most kept-secret.

" STOP TOUCHING ME, GET AWAY FROM ME! STOP IT! "

Gamagoori practically broke Mako's arm as he moved and threw it back to her, scooting in blind fear from her so fast he fell to the ground, nearly hitting his head on the glass coffee table. He pushed the table away from him until he could scoot far enough where he could curl up and look up at Mako in pure fear. His anxious tears fell with a chorus of whimpers as he shielded himself with one arm, his mind telling him to stay on his toes in case Mako saw not his fear but a desperation she thought she could control. His mind did not register the fact that he had revealed his panic to her. When he peeked fearfully over his arm to look at Mako, he did not expect what he saw.

Mako was crying. She sat on her knees with tears running down her face, her eyes widened like she had seen a ghost. She looked down at her hands for a moment before realizing what she had done.

"I'm sorry I pushed this, Gamagoori. I'm sorry. I should have known that something deeper was involved with this. We should have never tried any of this. I should go"

Gamagoori, even with his mind surrendered to his fear, responded quickly. "No! No, please just stay!"

Mako looked confused, slipping herself on the floor a few feet from him. "But I make you like this! You need your space!"

"I need-!" Gamagoori's yell cut off. What did he need? Comfort? Space? What did he need? Either way, he had waited too long and

Mako was starting to leave, removing herself from the floor and wiping away her tears.

"I-I should go, before I hurt you more"

Gamagoori grabbed for her as she turned to leave, tugging her down to his level again. She yelped as she fell into him but did not resist. She simply held him as he sobbed into her shoulder like a child, She knew now what she needed to do to help amend the situation and her mistake. She rubbed her free hand up and down his back, trying to soothe him and his obvious extreme panic attack. He hiccuped in his cries, his cries slowing down. Mako softly cried with him until she realized that she could do more.

"Gamagoori!"

Mako had left his secure hold and he looked up to see her in her familiar 'hallelujah' pose, arms crossed above her head and a spotlight lighting her up in theatrical fashion.

"I realize that I made a mistake and tried to push sex on you and I know that my apology will not be acceptable, but let me offer an alternative to show you that I am truly sorry for doing such a disgusting thing that has triggered something bad in your head! If you would like to, I ask with everything in me that you forgive my actions and my narrow-mindedness and let me know what has happened to you that made you fear sexual things so I may not make this humiliating mistake again and fix our relationship because I know I have severely damaged it by pushing something you obviously did not want to do!"

Gamagoori's fear and panic still ran rampant, his mind telling him to run as far away as possible and not look back, but he knew that he could not run from it any longer. Mako, even though she had not meant any pain, saw that it had caused a negative reaction and wanted to learn from it like a responsible adult. She wanted to know, to understand what had happened to him. He let out a shaky breath and offered a hand although it shook with the tremors of his attack.

Mako looked at it funny before she was at his side, rubbing her hands quickly together.

"I can also help calm you, if you're okay with me touching you. It was something my mom did when I freaked out about in the first days in the slums. I'll just be touching your temples and nothing else!"

Gamagoori took notice that Mako was treading lightly around him, like she knew already what to do this people having panic attacks. He did not question it and agreed to letting her touch him. She scooted up to him and rose her friction-warmed hands across his temples, her thumbs rubbing softly directly on them. The soothing warmth sent a comforting pressure into his mind, the tight ropes of his fearful thoughts releasing their tension. Thoughts that plagued him earlier faded once more into the void. His clenched hands started to relax little by little. His breathing started to relax as well, and his arms relaxed into his lap. Mako softly sighed in relief as she watched her efforts actually work, glad that she could start making up for her mistake.

"I know that you did not intend to hurt me Mako" Gamagoori murmured.

"I still left a scar though! I made you break down and cry!"

"Mako, you didn't know about this, you wouldn't have and I consented to it before you began"

Mako pouted. "It does not excuse the fact that I did it to this point! I feel terrible. I wrongly thought you were just excited and then I triggered something in you! I should be kicked out of here for what I did!"

Gamagoori's rational sense returned. In any other time, he would have thrown Mako out and let himself stew in his fear. He would have ended the relationship then and there, and make sure that he never had such urges for her again, but he knew Mako. She knew she made mistakes and has in the past. She never meant to hurt

him, and was simply doing what she thought was right. It was he who lost it, how let his fear consume him.

He knew that he wanted this. He finally realized that he could accept his urges and share them as the long hanging storm clouds parted and let his true thoughts to the surface.

"Mako, what you have done has helped me more than hurt me. 'Darkest before the dawn', right? Do not worry about it"

Mako still looked very uncertain and Gamagoori knew that she would not let it go easy. He softly kissed her to prove his words that she was forgiven, whispering against the smooth velvet of her lips that she was more right then wrong to push him. Mako was reluctant but she backed away from the kiss with a soft little smile.

"Thank you for forgiving me, Ira" she softly said, "Are you alright with telling me the back story to the sexual anxiety?"

"Yes, I am"

Gamagoori cupped both her hands in his and set them between them. "What you saw, that reaction to your evasion, began because of myself. I have always kept myself controlled, no matter what it was. Sexual urges, impulses abound from my past, it all needed to be controlled. Somewhere along the way, it just... collapsed into itself. I grew fearful of my natural bodily reactions. I feared my sexual urges like the plague. I would easily break down into panic and would constantly have cold sweats. I've fought it for years, denying it and concealing it from the world around me, not even Lady Satsuki know of this, at least I do not think she does. I refused to let such an embarrassing fear free to a world that had everything sexualized, while I shivered and shook in fear of it.

"It's formally called Erotophobia. The fear of things related to sex, mine focused on sexual urges. I realize now, thanks to you Mako, that I need to fight it now. I am determined now to fight it and knock it out of my system, but I know it will be a long, tedious task that will

not disappear within days and I can not do it alone. I know that in any situation involving anxiety that you must push the limits to make it better"

"A-and are you implying that I should do that?!" Mako exclaimed. She saw the calmness in his face, even as he started to shake. She took the sides of his face in her hands and slowly breathed alongside him as a panic attack came once more. He calmed it down once more and opened his eyes, staring into her endless brown eyes.

"If you are okay with doing it Mako, then I would like you to help me break my fear of my sexual urges. I trust you and I know in my heart that I want to do this with you. I realize that this event has scarred us both and I do not expect you to accept"

"I accept, Ira, I absolutely accept this responsibility!" Mako answered quickly. "I want to do this with you. I promise that I will help in any way"

Gamagoori sighed in relief, resting his forehead against Mako's. He could do this, he could fight it. He had Mako to help and support him through it, he could finally accept his urges and push the envelope with Mako and let them finally be free of the anxiety keeping second base from their grasp. Mako captured his lips with a silent smile, her hands sliding down to encircle his neck. He sighed into the kiss, his body craving more. His fear fired up as that signal came through, the shaking beginning again. Mako backed away as it started and repeated her earlier steps and helped him calm down. Gamagoori had a grimace on his face as Mako looked at him.

"Dammit" he growled, "We're never going to get anywhere"

Mako shook his head around. "Do not take that mentality! You are Ira Gamagoori, shield of the legendary Lady Satsuki and boyfriend of Mako Mankanshoku! You have fought through war and darkness and survived childhood bullies. You built yourself from the ground up and look where you are now! If you can fight through that and come out strong and brave, we can battle this fear! We can knock it out of the

park but like you said it will take time. No instant results! Maybe you could... try silencing it! It works for me, let's try it! Every time you start feeling that fear begin, try pushing it back and telling it to shut its stupid mouth up!"

Gamagoori agreed. They had to start somewhere to start progressing. He settled in his spot and let Mako climb into his lap again, her lips pressed on to his in a deep kiss, stirring the urges up once more in his stomach. His fear started up once again, but Gamagoori fought it as he kissed Mako back, silencing them for a moment. He felt his sexual urge for the first time in years without fear and it was a burning he felt everywhere. He wrapped his arms around her and let his tongue explore her mouth, fighting the anxiety when it rose up in him. Air dictated their actions as their lungs burned for its oxygen and they parted, panting softly. Mako's smile had returned. She leaned in to his ear.

"I'm going to try something, okay? To test if silencing your fear works" Mako asked, smiling the entire time with a purpose.

"Alright. Go a-head" he whispered, fighting the urge in his pants to try to move. His fear bubbled brightly at that one and he barely caught it before it exploded like he usually let it. Mako kissed the side of his face before moving so she was between his legs, her hands trailing down his chest like before. His heart started to pound again, the cold sweat starting again. He fought it, pushing it back and silencing its shrieks. He scolded his mind for fearing it. It wormed its way back into his thoughts though and he was shaking again. Mako continued, however, and her fingers found his pants once more. She gave a comforting smile up at him, placing one hand against his lower regions before reaching up and taking him by the lips, the kiss slow and romantic. His fear slithered back into a hiding spot in his mind and his anxiety left for a moment. Mako felt it too and laughed in victory, letting Gamagoori's lips free and returned back down to his crotch. She tugged at the elastic band and looked up for approval from Gamagoori.

"It's alright. Yes" he confirmed. She plunged a hand in, her fingers finding their way to his manhood quickly.

His fear exploded the instant her fingers found it, losing control without warning. The shaking returned full force and tears starting to come to him. Mako backed away, removing her hand and holding him close as he fought the anxiety attack. She helped him breathe through it, helping him build a rhythm to his breathing to help relax and take his mind off of the fear. The calm down process took time but it finally passed, leaving the couple exhausted in the wake of the attack.

"We made some progress!" Mako cheered.

Gamagoori flashed a smile at her. "Maybe we can start somewhere different on my body, to avoid a reaction like that again"

"Good idea. Maybe if we work up to that, I can finally touch it" Mako agreed, putting some blush on Gamagoori's face, Mako kissed his cheeks as he fought back that he was not flustered.

"Did you know you were blushing at that thought? You didn't start freaking out!"

Gamagoori let it settle and it dawned on him. He really had thought about it, a sexual thought, and he did not react negatively at it, but rather positively. He laughed in joy along with Mako.

Progress made, indeed.

The Night Before the Last, Bound

Breathe in, breathe out. Breathe in, breathe out, all will be alright. You do not control me anymore. My body is mine, and any reaction I have is not wrong! No fear, no panic, no shakes. This is my body and my body to use as I please. It is mine to share. My urges are not disgusting or scary, and should be indulged on with her. She has given so much to help and she deserves much more than what I have given-

"Gamagoori, are you okay?"

He let a breath out, rolling over to face Mako as she ran a comforting hand down his shoulder. It was his idea to have her sleep here with him to help him shake the fear he had of this stage, when they would eventually come here to finally finish their acts. She lay cuddled up against a pillow between them, her pajama top opened to show enough skin to send a shiver through his body like a gunshot, but it was warming and sent a pleasant message to his mind. A spoil to their long two weeks of work, he finally could have some sexual urge without backlash, and he reveled in the feel of that warmth crawling its way through his body, the unfamiliar reaction giving him goosebumps each time they happened.

"I'm okay, go back to sleep"

For two long, purposely painful weeks, they worked at cracking at his fearful shields and repairing him back to a place where he was comfortable with his body and his urges. For two of those days they worked on his body, the upper torso more specifically, and worked out kinks in the shield about being touched above the waist in ways that sent urges through him. Through Mako's explorations and methods, she burned through the fear by purposely triggering it, keeping Gamagoori deep in work on fighting back and correcting his fear. Stumbles and mistakes happened, seeing that Mako found an erogenous zone along his neck closer to his shoulders, and their

progress was stalled when Mako persisted on pushing the sensitive spot but they digressed, especially with 'the new moan button', as Mako put it after finding his erogenous zones. It brought about much post-calm down cuddling and spooning, another step they took to relax Gamagoori into the swing of things involved with sexual activity. So far, results showed promise for their future.

The rest besides their last two days was spend cementing Mako's work, all the while she was getting him comfortable with post-sex stuff she had learned from her family. Their last two was their days of rest and preparation for the next stage of combating his erotophobia. Tonight was their last night before jumping back on to the train mid-morning tomorrow.

Mako rubbed at her eyes as she sat up using her other arm. "Nope! You were having another internal battle again, I can tell. Your hand is still shaking."

She was ultimately right, he was still shaking. He moved so that his head was rested on her lap as if she were a human pillow, stretched out between her legs. He looked up into Mako's eyes before shutting his, sighing in relief as Mako slowly combed her hands through his hair in her usual method to help him calm down from an anxiety high. The way her nails trailed over his scalp somehow was comforting, and kept him at ease as the panic faded away once more and his shaking ceased. He opened his eyes again and looked up at Mako with a small smile played across his lips.

"Thank you once again Mako" he thanked her. Mako's smile came with her usual bright light, head tilted to the side as she did so.

"You're welcome. I got you Ira, no matter what you bring to the table, I'll be there to fight it and kicks its butt"

Gamagoori couldn't help but smile wider, still never gotten sick of her spirit and drive. "Then prepare soon for a fight to the death. Tomorrow we finally start lower torso and finally... f-finally..."

"Stop! Stop, no triggering late at night! Shush, shuuu, it's okay. Yep we're going lower, but not right now. Right now, we're keeping calm and catching our sleep before the big time. It's okay. I got you Gamagoori. I promised you I would never rush you unless you tell me to. Relax, think of what is to happen in the future, and remember that Mako has you no matter what happens"

Gamagoori found himself blinking back tears, his fear bubbling underneath a moment of breathlessness and freedom. *You have stayed and supported me always, and yet you do not ask anything in return. If anything right now, you are stronger than me. And because of that I adore you for your strength, loyalty, devotion, care and love toward me. I love you for these facts, Mako.*

"I love you too Ira" Mako whispered, leaning down to kiss him softly. "I love you with all your faults and fears"

Gamagoori's tears fell as he kissed back softly, his confession of love murmured against her lips several times. She matched each and every one happily, brushing away his tears and whispering to him that it was okay. These were happy tears for the fact that he was not alone in his distress. His fear, his cowardice. Mako was his cane, caretaker, and lover and these forces were now keeping him high and healing him.

"Get some sleep," Mako ordered as she sat up again, "I'll be here if you get hit in the middle of the night"

Gamagoori smiled once more before setting his head into a comfortable position in Mako's lap and closing his eyes, doing as Mako requested and thought about the future of them. As he sank back into rest, he slipped into his dreams once more and sighed in relief as it manifested into the one thing he hoped for. His panic started to bubble up but he could control it down enough to take in the dream.

He was staring into the wide, bright brown eyes of Mako, who was laying up on him clad in only a wide open button-up shirt. She

buttoned one of the middle buttons and sat up so she could lean against him, and sighed in satisfaction. He realized then that he was naked from the waist up and Mako really only had that button-up shirt on, no underwear in sight besides what looked like pants hidden by the couch they lay in. His dream led him to bring her closer, wrapping his arms around her midsection. She giggled before looking up at him with her big doe eyes.

"That was amazing Ira" Mako sighed, closing her eyes, "Mhhhm I also like that I can just run around now in only a shirt"

His heart pounded deftly in his chest, a familiar burning rising from his core. He could feel his fear poke and prod at the back of his thoughts, but it was easily brushed aside, his barriers keeping them at bay. He focused in on the flush on Mako's cheeks and the state of her wild hair, realizing that his dream was showing him a future where he and Mako had-

"I'm just glad that we finally did it" he replied, his dream keeping his thoughts shut down, "Thank you Mako"

"No problem! I told you I would get help you fight that fear! And we were able to conquer it for a night!"

Gamagoori lost all control the instant the realization hit him with its full force and sensory upload. He was body-slammed out of the colorful, perfect dream and into the dark, seething strings of his fear, locked away in a cradle of his devastating horror to his urges. He was swallowed in to the dark and cold where he screamed and screeched for freedom, only to have his fears tighten around him like a vice. He was put into the hands of the blackness and anxiety of his mind, entrusted to the dark hands he fed for so long.

'Gamagoori!'

A tear within the fear and black appeared with the sudden arrival of the voice, and Gamagoori grappled to the familiar bell-like sound of it, trying desperately to reach it before the crack sealed away and

locked him in until he could chew his way out. His mind fought against him and his wishes, paralyzing him to keep him from getting any closer. He was stronger than before, way more when this event started to many years ago. He killed the tendrils locking him down and ran for the light breaking through the black and shattering it into shards of stained grey glass. He was free of the feral fearful nightmare, and he finally ran out of his subconscious.

He gasped like he was taking his last breath when he woke up, eyes snapping open and bolting up into a seated position quickly as his heart beat a mile a minute, thoughts racing this way and that, his mind a static-filled mess presently. He could Mako screech from one of the other rooms and rush in at her quickest pace, nearly overshooting her jump on to the bed and almost ran face first into the headboard of his bed. She wrapped herself around him as he panted, doubled over with his chin nearly hitting his knees as he held his head near the bed below him. She held him as he slowly returned to reality, still caught partly in the black web of his phobia capturing his neck like a vampire, sucking away what calm and control he had.

"It's okay... it's okay, you're awake," Mako kept reminding him, never once letting him go, "I'm right here, open for conversation when you're free. Take the time to break out of it."

Gamagoori did as she said, slowly regaining what he had before the panic shock. He slowly uncurled from his near fetal position and leaned into the arms of Mako. She chuckled under her breath and curled up against him, balancing the weight he put on her on her shoulders. He slowly broke from the last lingering cobwebs and truly woke up, letting the tears he had felt burning free to fall. Mako was quick to intercept them before they fell very far.

Mako didn't push for information, neither did she walk out like she had no business with his silence. She simply sat with him, curled up beside him as he slowly came back to calm, his breathing exercises seeming to help him return to the present. Little by little, he took his weight off of Mako and held his own, and only then did he fall back

on to the bed. Mako followed, but took her honorary place on his chest, and looked up at him with a worried expression.

"Ira..." she did not say anymore, simply tucking herself into his expansive chest. He rested his chin on her head and slowly repeated his breathing exercise before finally gathering up his willpower and spoke to her.

"A dream..."

Mako scooted away just a bit, to get a better angle to look into his eyes truly, a hand brushing along his jawline. "What happened?"

At the mention of it, by her lips, the fear from it seemed to chuckle and reappear, threatening him and pulling at his thoughts dangerously. He shut his eyes quickly, remembering the good these talks did for him, how they helped him build resistance to the fear and how it gave him emotional and burden relief. The tangible threads of fear hissed and shrank away for now, forcibly fought away and put down. He opened his eyes again and couldn't help but smile when he realized that Mako was trying to help her own way, leaving little kisses along his jaw. When she realized he stepped back from his mental wars, she respectfully ended her kisses and waited for Gamagoori. He sat up again, and ran a hand through his disheveled hair, Mako quickly joining him by his side.

"It wasn't anything horrible or dark. It was the exact opposite," Gamagoori explained, his voice soft and cautious, expecting the worst from his fear, "... I dreamed about us, in the future..."

Mako's mouth opened enough to make a oval-like 'O', understanding then what his dream had included. "Graphic?"

"Post... just us, in the afterglow of it all, proud of ourselves that we finally conquered my fears. When my subconscious realized the context of it... I lost control and it took over again" Gamagoori sank into an out-of-place depression that wrapped him in a chilled embrace, "Mako, nothing is getting better. What I'm comfortable with

now haunts me in my sleep. All I'm doing is pushing my issue to different places in me"

He didn't expect Mako's hands to roughly grab him by the cheeks, forcing him to look directly into the endless brown of her eyes. She had a fire smoldering within the depths of her eyes, her fiery red-hot hidden talent coming alive.

"Ira Gamagoori, what has happened to your legendary resolve?! Have you really submitted so badly to this fear that you believe that all we're doing is playing shuffleboard with your insecurities? This is not the real you! You're filled with resolve to accomplish and complete anything! But since we've set out to fix this, you keep sinking deeper when it hits you. Is... is it because I'm failing you as a support system? Is it because we really aren't doing anything?" By this point, tears fell in large volumes down Mako's face.

"Are we just wasting our time with this Ira or are you going to stand tall in the face of these demons and tell them to go back to Hell?! Are... are you going to let them torment you to the point of depressive death or are you going to fight, with me by your side holding your sword's sheath and raring to help you battle them? Are you simply going to retreat away into your fortress again as you have done for so many years? Ira Gamagoori, tell me, are you really there or has a ghost eclipsed by his fear's shadow taken your place? You said yourself when we began our journey that it was going to be hard. I don't care if I must push you passed limits never thought of, but I refuse as a friend, a support, and as a lover to let you be swallowed by it again!

"Now what has become of Ira Gamagoori that he cowers in the face of a challenge? Weakness is to be expected but you are letting it win on purpose; you're caving to its requests like you're willingly allowing someone to probe your most private thoughts. Gamagoori... Ira, please don't fall back into the fear! I'm here to help, I'll be here to catch you! Please... please don't say those negative things. They're wrong. We're making progress, we're getting you comfortable in your own skin again. You aren't just moving your fears around, we're

facing them and removing them. What we're doing now wouldn't be possible unless we made progress!"

Mako's words shot straight through his heart, directly embedding into his soul. Every single word she yelled at him was right. Everything she said made sense to him, and all he could do in response, stunned into silence, was take her hands into his and completely envelop her in a soft embrace. She sighed into his chest as she returned the embrace, resting in Gamagoori's lap without a single incident, much less a fearless shiver from the closeness. Instead his entire body shook as the floodgates he had built up opened wide for the public, and he broke down in silent, painful sobbing. Mako accepted her duty once more and let him cry without judgement or talk, simply holding him as he held her, countless tears falling down his face. He fought against the sounds accompanying his cries, a few slipping from his hold.

"Thank you Mako... thank you so much. You are perfect"

Mako smiled softly, the brightness in her smile returning twofold. "Not perfect, just Mako. Just usual, lovable Mako"

Gamagoori kissed a soft line down her neck. "And I love you just like that."

Mako whimpered under the pressure of his lips, and Gamagoori felt the urge to do more return with a welcome burning, not a single fearful reaction following suit. He pressed his lips down harder on her neck, feeling the soft pattering of her heart through the vein under her skin. He felt comfortable with this, wanting to continue. Mako murmured affections under the moan she gave as Gamagoori tried out marking her, leaving little hickies along her collarbone. He slid his hands up her sides, pressing his fingers against her skin to give her the caresses she so deserved. Her body shivered under his hands, her back arching with each lovebite put on her. Gamagoori's hands found the underneath of her shirt quickly and went up, moving up until they were finger length from her breasts.

Heat boiled in his stomach. An uncomfortable, angry heat, searing through him with no retreat. Fear blossomed into his thoughts uninvited, his body reacting against the negative stimuli. He moved quickly, the fear pulling him one direction. His hands shot out from her shirt and hovered without purpose. He ceased marking her and sat frozen until the shakes started. Mako went from her aroused state back to comfort mode, helping Gamagoori as a minor panic attack swept through him.

"Hey... ," Mako murmured as Gamagoori recovered from it, "you actually acted on an urge! Due progress for the hard work."

Gamagoori nodded as he brushed away building tears. More progress, more things he could do, more freedom from the cage his fear created. He rested his forehead against hers, grateful for her positive words and encouragement. She smiled wide as he whispered his thanks for her comfort and help for the millionth time. Mako brought his forehead to her lips, leaving a lingering kiss.

"Always. I'll always be here for you," she murmured as she looked into Gamagoori's eyes, "No matter what. Do you still want to go through what we planned tomorrow, after all of this?"

Gamagoori turned to his thoughts for a moment, naturally leaning into Mako's hand as it brushed down the right side of his face. He understood her worry for him. Tonight was stressful enough, and he was already steaming toward sleeping. It would be logical to call off tomorrow's advancement of breaking his fearful cage, to give him a buffer to prepare for the hard hits he expected to receive with the experimentation. He expected a day full of much trial and error, leaving room for his panic attacks and shutdown that could occur. He knew tomorrow would not be as easy as these past two weeks.

Gamagoori knew, however, that he needed to break free. He needed to make his dream come true, he wanted his dream to be his reality. He needed to stand back on his feet for good, to see the world from outside the prison that trapped him.

"Absolutely. Tomorrow, we knock my fear off its feet and break it. I will not let our dream fade away, not now nor ever. Tomorrow, we move a step closer to what I, what we, want to do."

Gamagoori grabbed Mako's hands and put them between them. "Tomorrow is the day we're freed from my cages of fear!"

Mako nodded furiously in complete agreement, a glint of determination and passion in her eyes. Gamagoori had that exact glint and couldn't help but pull Mako back into an embrace. Mako sighed in relief as she curled up against his chest, glad to hear his heartbeat patter softly. She hooked her arms up under his, her hands gripping his back to get as close to him as possible. Gamagoori tried to do the same, tucking her within his arms and resting his chin on top of her head. Not another word passed between them, their hearts speaking for them. As fatigue took the reins, they slid silently back under the covers of their bed, resumed cuddling, and fell asleep without another thought.

However, a few minutes after Gamagoori fell into the hands of the sandman, Mako opened her eyes and peered up at him, watching his face relax into the bliss of a dreamless sleep. She kissed the tip of his nose and adjusted her place against his chest before letting the sound of his heart start to lull her to sleep.

"Tomorrow... you're closer to the freedom you deserve..." she mumbled before yawning and finally letting sleep take her into its embrace, blissfully dreaming about the things to come when they succeeded.